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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of 26 women full professors representing a variety of academic disciplines and professional fields at a Research I university explores issues of gender identification and women's community. The study found that respondents viewed their principal responsibility as advancement of their respective disciplines and perceived themselves as having less in common experientially and professionally with women faculty members from other disciplines. However, they maintained close, long-standing supportive ties with women colleagues; and in cases where women colleagues in the home department were scarce or absent, they identified with colleagues from other campuses. Sections of the paper discuss such issues as collegiality and community with respect to disciplinary commitment, salience of gender to discipline, the role of personal choice, and "women's communities" in academe. (Contains 30 references.) (RH)

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"A Singular Position:" Women Full Professors and Women's Community

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Abstract

Twenty-six women full professors at a Research I university were interviewed in this qualitative study of senior women faculty members' experiences and perceptions. Respondents viewed their principal responsibility as advancement of their respective disciplines and perceived having less in common experientially and professionally with women faculty members from other disciplines. Respondents maintained close, long-standing supportive ties with women colleagues, however. Respondents tended to identify close colleagues from campuses other than the home campus in cases where women colleagues in the home department were scarce or absent as well as in cases where other women were also represented in their departments. Themes surrounding collegiality and community with respect to disciplinary commitment, salience of gender to discipline, and the role of personal choices are discussed. Resulting perspectives on "women's community" in academe are developed and discussed.

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This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held in San Antonio, Texas, November 18-21, 1999. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

"Women faculty" is frequently a unit of analysis in studies of faculty members, such as composition of faculties (e.g., Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Moore & Sagaria, 1991; Sax, cited in Magner, 1999), promotion and tenure rates (e.g., Bernard, 1964; Glazer-Raymo, 1999), and academic culture (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Nerad, 1999; Pagano, 1990). Implicit in groupings by gender are the premises that gender constitutes a policy-relevant characteristic in higher education and that gender stratification will help reveal common experience and perspective patterns among men and women. Although women are broadly grouped into the "woman" or "female" category, such groupings do not necessarily shed insights into the nature or level of gender identification among respondents or the relative collegiality or community experienced by women faculty members in such broadly aggregated groups.

This study is an exploration of the gender identification and women's community as represented on one campus, from the perspectives of women full professors representing a variety of academic disciplines and professional fields. Women from a wide variety of departments were included in the study to maximize the range of experiences and backgrounds among women faculty, and to explore the companion notion of gender salience among various disciplines and fields. These and other dynamics form a backdrop against which an academic "community of women" emerges as a complicated and challenging phenomenon. This paper explores related perspectives and dynamics and offers implications for women's community-building in academe.

Women's community-building in academe creates a conundrum for female faculty. On the one hand, women have been socialized to emphasize relationality and women's moral nature has been defined in terms of caring for others or being in relation to others (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Gilligan, 1993). Such socialization creates an expectation that women will

value relationships more in all aspects of their lives, including their professional lives, which in turn develops an expectation that female faculty will develop and participate in "women's" community. On the other hand, the nature of academia at research universities demands primary allegiance to one's disciplinary field, and female faculty (indeed, all faculty) are said to join a "community" of scholars within those respective disciplines. This raises an important question: Is gender a legitimate or sufficient basis for community among scholars from a variety of disciplines and fields?

Theoretical Framework

Collegiality suggests professional connotations; community, which involves additional personal investment, has broader connotations. However, collegiality involves more than a shared disciplinary affiliation: "Collegiality [within departments] is far more likely to occur when there is a shared orientation to the discipline" (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996, p. 89). A "shared orientation" suggests similar or complementary approaches to creating and disseminating knowledge within any given field or discipline. This discussion specific to discipline does not suggest that female faculty work against or devalue community-building activities with women from other disciplines. Instead, it calls into question a rudimentary notion that female faculty across disciplines gather into a community at a research university merely because of their gender. Here the salience of gender within disciplinary discussions becomes a major factor in how women within various disciplines negotiate the system as women and as scholars. "Gender" is more or less salient in different disciplines, leading to a wide variety of ways in which gender is legitimately addressed or opened as a topic for attention by disciplinary experts. It follows that a female faculty member in engineering, for example, lives a different gendered life than a woman working in a field such as sociology or English, where gender is

more likely to be considered a viable topic for disciplinary inquiry. The different gender dynamics within departments and the range of experiences that results for women faculty members may militate against the process of women's community-building.

Based on the literature consulted, one could conclude that poor individual decisions about, for example, setting priorities, emulating appropriate role models and work styles, or adopting research and publishing strategies that maximize output, have kept women faculty as a group from achieving success in higher education. Other studies, however, concluded that institutional cultures and collective beliefs within and among departments that flourished in an era where women were not present in higher education remain largely intact and serve to prevent women from succeeding in great numbers (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Grumet, 1988; Pagano, 1990; Park, 1996). For example, Pagano (1990) concluded that the presence of women faculty represent the disciplinary absence of women's thought, language, and analysis, leaving women faculty exiles in the same disciplines with which they identify and seek to advance. However, relationality and connection are disproportionately associated with women rather than men, in the sense that for women, relationship maintenance, collegiality, and interpersonal considerations often figure prominently in decision-making (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1993) as well as in knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Based on prior data analysis, the women in this study strongly identified themselves as disciplinary experts and held a primary identification with their respective disciplines and fields, and they also identified experiences of being dismissed or minimized because of their gender irrespective of discipline or field (Hamrick, 1998). Furthermore, as women, these respondents occupy positions as traditionally as well as currently underrepresented persons in academe. Yet, as full professors, they also occupy positions of high rank and relative privilege as senior faculty

members. As such, their perspectives and descriptions from their combination outsider and insider standpoints (e.g. Collins, 1986) should serve to enlarge and complicate more traditional understandings of academic community.

To pursue the theoretical notion of women as marginalized within respective disciplines or fields, we wondered what kinds of women's communities or perspectives on women's community might accompany the experiences of being a woman scholar in one's field. Therefore, this research was theoretically framed using feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1986, 1991; Hartsock, 1987) in order to explore the sense-making structures, perceptions, strategies, and inferences that were characteristic among respondents. For example, Smith (1987) and Collins (1986) have argued persuasively for acknowledgement of standpoint (e.g., gender) as a major element in identifying problems, collecting data, and formulating conclusions in the field of sociology. Regarding this study, the uniquely positioned respondents' insights are gathered and discussed with attention to the gendered aspects of their work and the perceived community of women or for women on an individual campus as well as within higher education.

Methods and Analysis

Each of the 70 women full professors at a Research I institution (1395 full-time faculty including 685 full professors at the time of data collection) were invited to participate in an interview study on the "Characteristics, Experiences, and Perceptions" of women full professors. Twenty-six women full professors representing a variety of academic disciplines and fields agreed to be interviewed about issues such as career progress, institutional belonging, intersections of personal and professional experiences, and stress. All respondents were white and non-Hispanic, as are approximately 88% of women full professors nationwide (Knopp,

1995). Years in rank were similar between the sample of 26 respondents and the group of 70 professors. The social science and education areas were slightly over represented in the respondent group while the arts and humanities disciplines were slightly under represented (see Table 1).

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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Interviews with each respondent ranged between 50 minutes to more than four hours. Using prompts and silence, opportunities for interviewee-guided talk were provided to encourage respondents to name and describe their own experiences, thoughts, and conclusions (Reinharz, 1992). All interviews were transcribed to facilitate systematic analysis through use of the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify common themes and concepts (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) across the interviews. To ensure descriptive and interpretive validity, opportunities for clarification were presented during the interviews, and two forms of post-interview member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted.

In the discussion that follows, "discipline" is used when discussing academic discipline, professional field, or specialty in order to streamline the presentation. Additionally, respondents were assured anonymity with respect to specific departmental affiliation, so the four aggregate categories in Table 1 are used to characterize respondents' academic backgrounds.

Results

The themes that emerged from data analysis were disciplinary commitment, salience of gender to discipline, role of personal choice, and experiences of women's community.

Respondents identified themselves primarily as scholars of their respective disciplines, and they were very aware of the high or low salience of gender as an issue within their disciplines. Respondents made choices—particularly with respect to scholarship they pursued—based on these understandings and their perceptions of academic success within a research university framework. Respondents finally identified strong and sustaining women's communities of which they are part, yet most of these communities were not based at this university or among the respondent group (or the larger group of women full professors). Rather, their women's communities tended to be collections of long-term colleagues, now friends, with whom they kept in contact via phone, e-mail, and infrequent visits. Each of the themes is discussed in turn below.

Disciplinary Commitment. A developing awareness of disciplinary focus and commitment began for respondents during graduate education and continued throughout their careers. The discipline served as a framework for understanding the academic work that lay before them, and respondents in many ways trained their attention to a discipline through their interactions with professors at the undergraduate and graduate levels. These opportunities for early professional relationships, modeling, and affirmation were key experiences for many respondents. A social sciences and education respondent observed:

> I worked for a [discipline-specific] professor, who really showed me a side of research in [the discipline] that was very exciting to me, that was beyond the classroom and the usual things you learned, because it was part of my job to collect data for him, and so forth. And those two things were very instrumental in moving me, then, to the next level, and then I was very fortunate to have a major professor for both my master's and Ph.D. degree that was somebody who really challenged me and gave me lots of responsibility, and built my confidence, and so on, as I had that kind of modeling.

Women full professors in this study defined themselves in terms of their academic discipline and their contributions as experts to their respective fields. In describing their work commitments prior to promotion to full professor, they clearly focused energy and time on disciplinary contributions and eliminated or minimized activities, whenever possible, that might derail their efforts to make these contributions. Most respondents could be classified among Gouldner's (1957) "cosmopolitan" faculty members who principally identify with the discipline and the department as local site of the discipline (as opposed to "locals" with primary commitments to the home institution). This disciplinary identification also influenced their descriptions of themselves as women representing those disciplines. As one biological and agricultural sciences respondent put it, "I am a [scientist], first and foremost."

Steadfast commitments to disciplinary fields and departments as primary sites of professional identification appeared to be a consistent value across disciplines. Respondents learned early in their careers to be sensitive to departmental expectations to achieve tenure but also to be taken seriously as a scholar. The disciplinary commitment was to be lived, as a woman in the biological and agricultural sciences field said:

> You have to be 100% dedicated. It's not a 9 to 5, and 8 to 6, or you know, a 9 to 8 job. It's a lot of your life, and you have to really love it, because if you don't, you won't want to put the time into it. And so it's really a commitment they [graduate students] have to make, and once they've made the commitment, the thing is to enjoy it.

Often respondents learned to do the work that would have validity according to the department, even as they personally valued other projects more. This was the experience of one arts and humanities respondent:

> After I was tenured, I worked on a computer project. And I thought it was quite an important project, and it seemed to be getting me an international reputation, and I was real pleased with it. And I thought when I first came up five years later, for my next review, I went, "Oh, boy. This is great. My stuff is being used at Harvard and Princeton and Yale, and, you know, this is super. I'm going to get promoted real fast." My department took one look at it and said, "What is she wasting her time on? . . .This isn't important." You know, "We don't support this at all." And so I wasn't even sent forward, and I was told that I should devote my time to things that had to do with [departmentally-valued] research and not "computer stuff." That was going to be counted as service, and that was not going to ever get me promoted.

A social sciences and education respondent echoed a similar awareness of meeting disciplinary or departmental expectations. She said, "Sometimes some women who research in areas of diversity are not granted tenure because that's not viewed as authentic research . . . . I've walked a fine line, I guess, between doing just enough research and writing that is institutionally validated and that which I find is more transformative and critical of the institution."

Women understood their field or discipline to be a more important concern than gender in developing their academic careers. A respondent from the sciences remarked that a graduate student colleague of hers was chosen over her not due to unfair gender biases but because "he was in a discipline that his mentor really wanted to strengthen . . . It was the discipline. . . . And I don't think you can attribute that to male, female, etc." However, another sciences respondent recognized that what "females experience differently is the general attitude towards them." The experience of being regarded as different was generally shared among respondents, but

manifestations of differential regard varied. One way to analyze these differences was through examining the salience of gender to various disciplines.

Salience of gender to discipline. Not surprisingly, a variety of perspectives emerged surrounding career experiences and the role that being a woman played in these experiences. However, in many ways these perspectives were related to disciplinary affiliation. Within certain fields, such as the humanities and social sciences, gender has become a more salient issue for scholarly attention within various disciplines, and respondents in these departments often drew upon a professional language and culture in which gender was part (albeit at times grudgingly) of legitimate scholarly discourse.

Some respondents from the arts and humanities and social sciences and education disciplines spoke of close personal and professional intersections, such as using their children and aspects of their family lives as classroom examples or as an impetus for research studies. One social sciences and education respondent remarked:

> I was able to have my daughter in that lab school [that I directed], which was wonderful in terms of having her on site and having her there and being able to go in at any time during the day and watch her, being able to have her in an older children's lab school after school when she was in elementary school, so that was really a nice merging. And also just being in the field of early childhood and then having a child provided me with unbelievable credible anecdotes to share in the classroom.

Upon further reflection, this respondent added, "I think the students have always responded that they really liked that personal side in that I would share my successes and failures, both in early childhood teaching but also as a parent." Another social sciences and education respondent observed, " I think that my profession is so near and dear to the family life, what I'm learning

and doing and the ability to learn from my profession and apply it to the family, but also my family has been a wonderful example of a living experience from my profession."

For women faculty in fields such as engineering or science, however, gender was rarely viewed as a discourse category or a unit of analysis central to the pursuit of disciplinary knowledge. In these fields, being female and speaking of gender often served to place one outside the core issues of the discipline and symbolized instead a departure or distraction from one's role as content expert. Among respondents, issues of gender and their own statuses as women overlapped with professional interests and research agendas in some cases but not in others. More typically, female scientists in this study echoed the view that success as an academic, in the words of one sciences respondent, "has nothing to do with gender at all. It's just where you happen to be."

Another respondent from a physical and mathematical sciences and engineering field said, "I have not found women faculty in other departments, you know, in other colleges outside of [my scientific discipline] to understand what we're going through here. It's a lot tougher, from anything I've heard expressed by any women at any of the universities I've taught at...." This faculty member shared that she found even within the sciences some fields were more permissive than others. "I mean, even physics has more women full professors than [my department], statistically, and so somehow, when I meet physics professors, somehow they're different than [her field] professors. They tend to be more open to the world, politically more liberal."

Gender issues affected respondents within the traditionally male science disciplines, but especially with respect to working conditions as a faculty member. One physical and mathematical sciences and engineering respondent noted that, due in part to her experience of an

unsuccessful preliminary review, she has come to view third year reviews as ways "that they can really weed out people." She continued:

> [The university at which I worked earlier] has very few women and minorities in [this discipline]. They have a real dismal record. Most schools [emphasizing this discipline] do, but [the prominent technological university] is really very dismal, and when I was there, there were a lot of problems with women in the department, women students coming to me. I was the first and only woman they had ever had in that department, and I was pretty young and green, you know, but I think that's what's coloring me on the whole question of a third-year review, because I went through that, and it's a way they don't have to really treat you with the full consideration of a six-year review, and they legally, then, have it so that if they don't like you at the third year, then you're out. You get one more year, which I spent . . . looking for a job.

As a minority in her applied science field, this respondent's comments echo not only the frustrations with being the sole woman in a department but also the notion of a "cultural tax" (Padilla, cited in Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Minority faculty members pay this tax in the form of extra attention to students, additional service work (often in areas related to diversity and equity), and public relations appearances on behalf of the university or department, all of which are expected but do not count towards tenure and promotion. Although faculty members do what they and their departments perceive as needed work in these areas, the work is also judged to be a distraction from the scholarly work advancing the discipline that is valued in the tenure and promotion process.

One exception to the low to nonexistent salience of gender within the science disciplines was interest in increasing the representation of women professionals in science and applied

science fields, including the professoriate. Respondents, however, do not tend to portray the working conditions—primarily the level of collegiality—as a feature of their work that might serve to attract and retain women into science fields. Among science respondents, for example, ignoring disrespectful incidents in their own careers and work circumstances seemed to be the preferred strategy for dealing with gender in the academic workplace. According to one biological and agricultural sciences respondent:

> I think one thing that females have to watch out for is becoming too sensitive to those things, because it can only hurt yourself, and so, really, I think that those people who--those females who have stayed in science have really ignored. They happen. You're not happy about it. They make a statement to you, but you just ignore and go on.

For this respondent, too much sensitivity to the conditions or environment of one's work diverts one's attention from what she regards as truly important—carrying out the work itself. However, if adverse or insensitive treatment is not addressed, it may well continue. The strategy of ignoring or dismissing disrespectful episodes appears to advantage individuals with the abilities to, as one respondent put it, "let it roll off my back." Among these respondents—all of whom have achieved senior rank in the institution and demonstrated their abilities to work successfully within their environments—experiencing unpleasantness or disrespect has not necessarily been allowed to slight respondents' perceptions of the fundamental quality of their work or the legitimacy of their presence.

The ability to "just ignore and go on" represented an important personal strategy or choice, however, for several respondents. This choice and the nature of other personal choices as they relate to priorities and time were also common themes among respondents.

Role of Personal Choices. Primary manifestations of gender salience in many women's lives are the personal choices made about family and career, often with consequences in terms of time (e.g., Hothschild, 1990) and career advancement (e.g., Schwartz & Zimmerman, 1992) that have affected women professionals disproportionately. Personal choices that respondents made often were crucial to their overall perceived successes, but experiences varied widely. Most of the choices centered on time allocation, as in the following: "The thing that determines whether you make it or not, is how you use your time, and you have to prioritize." Careful attention to timing was cited by many respondents as a consideration in making life decisions as well. A faculty member from the sciences felt personal choices were critical to her professional development; indeed, she saw the personal and professional as intrinsically connected:

> To me, it has always seemed very arbitrary for people to say, "Well, you know, you shouldn't have to put off child-bearing until you have tenure or until you have a good job or this or that," and to me, "Yes, you do. You need to have income. You need to be able to support [your children]." And so it's really difficult or impossible to separate what you choose personally from what you're doing professionally.

As this respondent clearly indicated, personal choices are often guided by (or made in light of) institutional structures and expectations. Institutional structures often gave respondents clear messages and little latitude about attaining success. "Write papers, write papers, write papers, write papers," concluded one respondent from a science discipline.

Personal choices cited by respondents also centered on decisions they made regarding family, handling disrespect or indifference, and use of time. Some women postponed having children, but many also chose to have children—even while going through tenure review. Such

was the experience of one social sciences and education respondent, who said, "I had my second child actually with I was going up for promotion here. . . . When I was putting my promotion packages together, I was also buying layettes and whatnot."

However, another respondent from biological and applied sciences recalled departmental resistance to personal choices she made nearly every step of her graduate education:

> The chair of the department, who I respected in many ways, in fact, but he said to me, "Why don't you go off and have your children first, and then come back and get your degree?" So that was the piece of encouragement I got. And so I decided not to do that, and they agreed reluctantly to take me on as a master's candidate, and so I came in as a master's candidate, and ended up getting my Ph.D. degree in three years, but they weren't willing to let me start out that way.

Often "personal choice" reflected a response to challenging academic expectations where it might be more appropriate to say that women made "personal adaptations" to sometimes hostile environments for women. Seen this way, it was not so much "personal choice" as choosing to do what she had to do to succeed at a research university. However, it is important to note that most women in this study not only "adapted" to the institutional culture but found creative and personally meaningful ways to thrive within that culture. Attitude toward "gender messages" factored largely in the ability of these women *to* succeed within the academy. A woman in social sciences and education said, "I create my own aura of power and respect. I don't think the system works to produce that for a person. She or he has to create that. She has to create that for herself, that respect and status, and so forth, and sense of personal power, but the system works against that."

Within a system featuring little latitude for choices, notions of community and community-building among women present challenges for women across the disciplines. Together with salience of gender and commitment to disciplines, an interdisciplinary and feminist cross-cutting notion of "women's community" becomes even more problematic to envision.

Women's Community. Many respondents spoke of the absence of community among women faculty members on the campus. According to one respondent from social sciences and education, "It concerns me that I don't know very many women on campus, because every place I've been before, strong women's community has been really important." However, this emphatically does not mean that relationships with other women were unimportant or devalued by respondents. Respondents spoke extensively about mentoring other women within their respective disciplines and encouraging women in their disciplines and others to succeed, such as the social sciences and education professor who remarked, "as a senior woman faculty member and one of not very many in my field, my job is to mentor women across the world."

Some respondents found supportive networks with other female faculty members outside of their home departments:

> I find I have an incredibly strong female support network with friends . . . who work in the university, but not in my department, and one who has been—who went through a divorce at the same time I did and [we] raised our kids together [but she has now moved away]. . . Whenever I have something that I really need to get on the table or process, I will call all three of them.

A small number of respondents described close relationships with other women and men within their departments, such as this arts and humanities respondent:

> My husband also teaches in this department. Most of our friends are in this department—our friends here in town—so . . . it's our own little community now. A lot of them live in our neighborhood, even. . . . It's pleasant because, of course, those are people we share a lot with in terms of what we're interested in, what we think about. We complain about the same things.

For most respondents, however, the community of women they discussed was frequently not only discipline-related but also far-flung. Respondents relished opportunities to network across the miles with women from other institutions—often women with whom they went to graduate school and maintained a strong connection through professional conference attendance and electronic mail. One respondent from a traditional science field felt "the only common experience [or sense of community] I have is with my women colleagues in [her disciplinary field] across the country." A social sciences and education respondent put it this way:

> When I did my Ph.D., there were a large group of us, and those friends are now colleagues, they're all at different institutions across the country, but I think that group has always been—when we go to professional meetings, etc., there's that camaraderie and that support, the interest in each other and what we're doing and what, you know, idea sharing, and not so much collaboration in terms of doing research, but collaboration in terms of willingness to reflect in dialogue in relationship to ideas that we have.

Another woman from arts and humanities corroborated this view. She said, "Really most of the support that I had [at a particularly difficult time] was off campus, was within my professional organization, and almost all of the people that helped me intellectually to do the work I was doing were not here. They were elsewhere. . . . they were all over the country and the world."

This far-flung collection of friends and colleagues was most often cited as a key supportive community or network by respondents. One arts and humanities respondent contrasted this to the lesser sense of local community she perceived: "I network with lots of women away from [this institution], and I have lots of women friends, here, you know, but there isn't such a thing as a real professional network."

Among many respondents, their communities of women were comprised of disciplinary colleagues at other institutions, many of whom had been graduate school peers or colleagues, and with whom respondents had regular opportunities for face-to-face contact—mostly at disciplinary conferences. Only a few respondents spoke of close relationships with women in their own departments (particularly in the sciences where respondents were the only women or one of very few), but close contacts with women in their geographically-dispersed disciplinary communities were maintained through communication technology—principally telephone and electronic mail.

In terms of a cross-disciplinary community on the campus, respondents mentioned their contacts with other faculty members (women and men) as enjoyable and conducive to successful committee work and institutional governance participation. A social sciences and education respondent said:

> Support is through friends and community and a few in the university, collaboration with people on projects, and mostly outside this department and out of the college, but I find a lot of interest in friendship with people in other departments. You know, that is professional in the sense that it evolves usually out of serving on somebody's committee. You get to know people in other departments, so I've found a lot of commonality with

people across campus, which I think is real satisfying and gives a sense that there's more to this enterprise than first meets the eye.

However, these relationships also had been exacted at a price of time--often time away from research and writing and with little value to their cases for promotion and tenure. Said one social sciences and education respondent: "My friends are my colleagues. I have family and I have work. That's all I have time for now."

As a group, the respondents prized their independence and opportunities to make disciplinary contributions more highly than having community among women on campus, particularly since many relied on their long-standing networks of women friends and colleagues at other campuses. By focusing on disciplinary (and departmental) expectations, respondents established themselves as experts within their given fields, and their communities of friends generally were populated by disciplinary colleagues as well.

Disciplinary expectations in and of themselves may have served to hinder the development of a "women's community," due to time dedicated to work but also in terms of differential salience of gender and an uncertain basis for common experiences among respondents. The idea of a unified "women's community," carrying an assumption that all women on campus face similar challenges or similar realities proved to be a false assumption and unrealistic expectation, based on respondents' stories. Differences among disciplinary fields instead lead to multiple realities for various respondents. One faculty member from the physical and mathematical sciences and engineering group said:

> When I'd go to these [feminist book discussion group] meetings, they're mostly [arts and humanities] professors there, but professors from [social sciences], too. I always think, "Wow, they really have a totally different world. They don't know what it's like." I really

> cannot express what it's like because it's different. It's certainly different from women who are in colleges like [social sciences and education disciplines]. . . . Maybe [a professional school professor's] experience is somewhat like mine. I don't know, but I have not found women faculty in other departments, you know, in other colleges outside of [mine] to understand what we're going through here. It's a lot tougher, from anything I've heard expressed by any women at any of the universities I've taught at, and the only common experience I have is with my women colleagues in [my discipline] across the country.

Respondents identified differences not only in terms of disciplinary demands, but also in terms of philosophical differences. A social sciences and education professor observed: "I think [the sciences mission is] a little different that the mission viewed by someone in the liberal arts. That may have more of a teaching focus, but less focus on the mission of a land grant university."

Expectations of establishing a unified "women's community," then, oversimplifies the complex dimensions and dynamics of gender and experiences within academic departments across campus. Further, expectations that women across campus have the same concerns or a shared discourse or agenda misrepresent—and severely underestimate—the power of the disciplinary focus among these women who have achieved full professorship. Given departmental realities, the concept of "women's community" is problematic at best and may serve to undermine the potentially valuable coalitions that could be built by acknowledging differences among women professors' experiences and perceptions.

Conclusions and Implications

Respondents in this study placed a premium on their disciplinary work and, for most, on their accomplishments as researchers and contributors to their disciplines. However, with respect

to institutional rewards for faculty who make disciplinary contributions, Smart (1991) showed that one's gender is more closely related to rank and salary than one's scholarly contributions. Even if gender is not salient in the academic discourse of certain disciplines, it is a highly salient factor in explaining an institution's material valuing of faculty members across academic disciplines. Although feminist scholarship is gaining more acceptance, it also constitutes a dilemma for feminist scholars, such as the respondent who spoke of engaging in transformative and critical scholarship only to the extent that it was balanced on her vita with more mainstream and accepted scholarship. In her study of myths surrounding the conditions and progress of women faculty, Glazer-Raymo (1999) discussed another dilemma faced by women law school faculty, for whom the crux of legal scholarship is studying the application of laws to specific people and situations (e.g., women) yet their focus on gender is considered less compatible with the norms of legal scholarship. This study provides more evidence of the slow rate of change and the resistance faced by women scholars who identify themselves most strongly with their disciplines and seek to make original contributions to advance their disciplines. In her discussion of women trustees, Glazer-Raymo (1999) also noted that women trustees were more often the inheritors of wealth rather than producers of wealth. In terms of scholarship, consistent with Pagano's (1990) work on women as exiles from disciplinary communities, success as a women faculty member may disproportionately hinge on being an inheritor and conservator of disciplinary knowledge more than on advancing the discipline through contributing new viewpoints that nondominant members with their different standpoints can bring.

Most of the women full professors in this study describe their achievement of success in terms of embracing departmental values and focusing on the demands received within their individual disciplines. Within this system, individual choices are made about how to allocate

time and where to put effort. However, constraints on choices are apparent as well. Respondents succeeded because they felt comfortable with the rules of the system, ignored or dismissed sexist messages, and learned to do their best work within the system as they read and understood it. This does not mean that the respondents saw no flaws in institutional structures or did not challenge unfair decisions and processes (including some respondents' formal, successful challenges to their own promotion and tenure bids that were initially rejected).

Based on the results from this study, women faculty members across a variety of disciplines likely do not operate with the same pressures and concerns or speak similar disciplinary languages about the role and salience of gender. Women in this study faced very different sorts of challenges, experiences, and obligations that may make interdisciplinary agreement on the experiences or needs of "women in academe" nearly impossible to achieve. In light of the portrait that emerged of well-socialized academic experts who represented a variety of disciplines and placed their highest affiliation with their discipline, the notion of an interdisciplinary women's community need not be abandoned, yet it should not be a simplistic conception based on assumptions of broadly shared experiences and meanings by individual women.

A wide variety of work environments exists across any one campus, characterized by departmental and/or program character, local history, and countless other factors. Delamont, Atkinson, and Parry (1997) described the necessity of understanding how disciplinary judgments are made and of helping aspiring faculty who may otherwise be "cue-deaf" (p. 105) to prevailing expectations and standards characteristic of the discipline. The respondents in this study, all senior professors, have keen understandings of their disciplinary environments, including content command as well as the differential salience of gender. These understandings—plus their

primary professional identities as disciplinary experts—will shape what kinds of cross-disciplinary, local women's communities are realistic possibilities. Pagano (1990), speaking of the authoritarianism inherent in the patriarchal academy, related:

> We learned what was irrelevant, philosophically uninteresting, and of minor artistic interest. We learned to live with our guilt over the suspicion that we were all of those things. Usually we repressed the rage at institutions and arrangements which were not made for us, happy to have an equal chance. (p. 36)

As women faculty are socialized further into their respective disciplinary expertise, they may also perceive little commonality or solidarity with other women faculty members with whom they share the state of being female and being a nondominant person on the campus yet do not share similar disciplinary meaning-making structures or even similar sets of discriminatory or isolating experiences.

Following the complex portrait emerging from this data, Tierney's (1993) "communities of difference" offers a more complicated yet likely more attainable alternative for envisioning interdisciplinary communities among women faculty members. In communities of difference, common ground is not assumed to be commonality of *experience* but instead a common *opportunity* to understand one another's competing and often conflictual obligations and to appreciate the complex and multiple dynamics surrounding gender on a certain campus and within various disciplinary discourses. Such discussion and frank dialogue may lead to a more satisfying sense of community in which women's experiences need not be identical but where multiple perspectives are valued, surfaced, and explored. Pagano (1990) echoed this characteristic of community when she concluded that women, through speaking together, realize that "We are connected and we are different" (p. 156). Such communities may also represent

strategies for realizing change on campuses. Women faculty on a given campus may be, as Glazer-Raymo (1999) termed it, "a loosely-connected polity rather than a unified organization of activists. Academic priorities preoccupy their energies and deter their involvement in potentially intrusive policy debates" (p. 205).

This study also has implications for mentoring and socialization of aspiring women professors or professors currently in lower ranks. These implications include the primacy of developing one's disciplinary expertise and the cultivation of a community of graduate student peers as the important beginnings of one's community of women. However, such socialization, a byproduct of developing disciplinary specialization, also may militate against cross-disciplinary collaborations espoused by many campuses. In many ways, this study has affirmed the strength and enduring power—as well as the perhaps unanticipated consequences—of the cosmopolitan faculty role, in which energies are devoted to advancing the discipline at the expense of attending to local campus-level problems, participating in formal or informal campus governance processes, and pursuing community with women from across campus.

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Table 1: Disciplinary distributions among respondent group and population

	Population (N=70)	Respondents (N=26)
Arts and Humanities (AH)	26%	19%
Biological and Agricultural Sciences (BAS)	17%	19%
Physical and Mathematical Sciences (PMSE) & Engineering	6%	4%
Social Sciences and Education (SSE)	51%	58%